



Informed communities to protect vultures and wildlife



PHOTO BY REBECCA IKACHOI

A community sensitisation meeting in session at Maasai Mara.

BY JOHN MWACHARO AND REBECCA IKACHOI

Vultures and other scavenging birds play a critical role in maintaining healthy ecosystems. Their decline can have serious unforeseen effects on other species and the many benefits provided by nature. The main cause of the drop in African vulture populations is poisoning. When predators kill livestock, herders may take revenge by lacing the carcass with poison. Vultures are particularly sensitive, and may die in large numbers after feeding on a poisoned carcass.

While it is difficult to prevent wildlife poisoning, rapid response and immediate action can significantly reduce resultant wildlife deaths and environmental contamination.

In Maasai Mara ecosystem, Nature Kenya, the Peregrine Fund, BirdLife International and the Kenya Bird of Prey Trust, under the 'Preventing Poisoning to Save Africa's Vultures' project, have been testing various approaches aimed at reducing poisoning related wildlife deaths. One such approach is sensitizing the community about the negative impacts of wildlife poisoning. Community meetings at villages and manyattas within the Greater Mara ecosystem have been taking place to raise awareness on the plight of vultures and the impacts of illegal wildlife poisoning. The meetings seek to ensure that the public is aware of the value of vultures, threats facing them and the need for their conservation.

Most wildlife poisoning incidences are retaliatory in nature. The poisoning mainly occurs after pastoralists lose their cattle to predator attacks. The pastoralists then lace cattle carcasses with poisonous substances such as pesticides. The poison not only ends up killing the targeted predator but also scavenging animals such as hyenas and vultures. A single poisoned cow carcass can end up killing 150 vultures! It is therefore extremely important for communities to understand the dangers posed by wildlife poisoning.

In October, 10 community meetings were conducted within Maji Moto and Olkinyei areas

which border Olarro and Olkinyei conservancies respectively. Continued interaction with the communities has helped to identify conflict prone areas, leading to directing more efforts to such areas. During such interactions, community members are engaged and the effects of poisoning are discussed. Focus is directed to the poisoning cycle where a single poisoned carcass may affect many other species within an ecosystem, including humans. Measures to mitigate human-wildlife conflict are also discussed. The emphasis here is the importance of maintaining a healthy ecosystem in which all species can thrive.

Actions that have been agreed upon by the communities in these meetings include stopping the baiting of livestock carcasses with poison. Instead, community members agreed to report predator invasions to village elders to help mobilize local support for affected households, and to take such cases to the relevant authorities.

So far 20 large villages and 16 large manyattas have been reached out to, in addition to 15 market outreaches across Maasai Mara, reaching up to 30,000 community members.

Other initiatives undertaken to reduce wildlife poisoning include training of rangers from the Maasai Mara National Reserve on how to respond to poisoning incidents. Sixteen rangers have been trained. Another 45 rangers from 15 community conservancies have also undergone the training.

One notable impact of the anti-poisoning campaign is a recorded increase of Critically Endangered White-backed Vultures' nests in Maasai Mara.

'Preventing Poisoning to Save Africa's Vultures' is financed by Band Foundation. This initiative in Kenya is also supported as part of a program to tackle vulture poisoning running jointly across Kenya, Botswana and Zimbabwe, funded by Fondation Segré.



PHOTO BY PETER USHER

White-backed Vultures in Maasai Mara.

ACTION

BIRD MIGRATION

The bird we ringed is back from North

■ SIKENYKENY KIPKORIR

A single bird can "make the day" for ringers at the ringing exercise at the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) Nairobi. This might be through re-trapping an exceptionally old bird or having an unusual visitor or even having a migratory bird using the same site over years. Last month the ringing group welcomed back a Common Nightingale which was ringed at the National Museums on March 2018 and was re-caught on 11th November at the same ringing location.

Common Nightingale is an insectivorous species that breeds in forest and scrub in Europe and in Asia as far as north-west China. Assuming this bird didn't go further south and that it went to breed at its nearest breeding grounds in Turkey, moving in a straight line through the well-known migratory route for passerine birds through Egypt, then it would have travelled a journey of at least 4,500 kilometers one way and 4,500 km back to Nairobi.

Bird ringing entails tagging of birds using individually numbered metal or plastic ring to the leg. The exercise is done every Tuesday at the museum ground by the Nairobi Ringing Group under the leadership of the Ornithology Section staff through the support of Nature Kenya. The birds are caught using specialized nets called mist nets, measured, ringed and released to continue their life, hoping they will be caught again.

Birds migrate to escape harsh winters in the North, and go back to their breeding grounds in summer. It's phenomenal for tiny birds like a Common Nightingale to travel thousands of kilometers and find its way back into the same nets months later. As the threats to birds including loss of habitat, climate change, poisoning and illegal trapping increases, we hope our Common Nightingale will be able to make more journeys back and forth. We wish the Nightingale an enjoyable stay here at the tropics. 🌿



PHOTO BY CARLOS DELGADO



PHOTO BY KARIN DUTHIE

A Golden-rumped Sengi listed as Endangered.

New report paints disturbing picture of humanity pushing nature to the brink

According to WWF's latest Living Planet Report 2018, the way we feed, fuel and finance our societies and economies is pushing nature to the brink.

The report, which comes out every two years, presents a sobering picture of the impact of human activity on the world's wildlife, forests, oceans, rivers and climate. It underscores the rapidly closing window for action and the urgent need for the global community to rethink and redefine how we value, protect and restore nature.

Through indicators such as the Living Planet Index (LPI), provided by the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), the Species Habitat Index (SHI), the IUCN Red List Index (RLI) and the Biodiversity Intactness Index (BII), as well as Planetary Boundaries and the Ecological Footprint, the report paints a singular disturbing picture – human activity is pushing the planet's natural systems that support life on earth to the edge.

The LPI, which tracks trends in global wildlife abundance, indicates that global populations of fish, birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles declined, on average, by 60% between 1970 and 2014, the most recent year with available data. The top threats to species identified in the report are directly linked to human activities, including habitat loss and degradation and overexploitation of wildlife.

Over recent decades, human activity has severely impacted the habitats and natural resources we depend on, such as oceans, forests, coral reefs, wetlands and

mangroves. An example is that 20% of the Amazon has disappeared in just 50 years while the Earth is estimated to have lost about half of its shallow water corals in the past 30 years.

While highlighting the extent and impact of human activity on nature, the Living Planet Report 2018 also focuses on the importance and value of nature to people's health and well-being and that of our societies and economies. Globally, nature provides services worth around \$125tn a year, while also helping to ensure a supply of fresh air, clean water, food, energy, medicines and other products and materials.

The report also specifically looks at the importance of pollinators and how a changing climate, intensive agricultural practices, invasive species and emerging diseases have impacted their abundance, diversity and health.

Evidence shows that the two agendas – for the environment and human development – must converge if we are to build a sustainable future for all.

The Living Planet Report 2018 highlights the opportunity the global community has to protect and restore nature leading up to 2020, a critical year when leaders are expected to review the progress made on the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

Source: www.bizcommunity.com

For updates visit
www.naturekenya.org

EDITORIAL TEAM

Fleur Ng'weno
Gloria Waswa
John Mwacharo
Norman Kiboi
Serah Munguti

LAYOUT

John Mwacharo
FRONT BANNER
Peter Usher



NatureKenya

THE EAST AFRICA NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

Nature-Kenya

@Nature_Kenya

nature_kenya

Nature Kenya

For contributions, advertising and subscriptions, contact us by:

Post: P. O. Box 44486 GPO, Nairobi

Telephone: 020 3537568/0780149200/0751624312/ 0771343138

Email: office@naturekenya.org

Printed with support from:



NATURE RESERVE

Naretunoi Conservancy

In October Nature Kenya's Sunday Birdwatch spent a delightful day at The Wildlife Foundation on Naretunoi Conservancy – across the Mbagathi River from Hippo Pools in Nairobi National Park. We drove in from Kitengela town, watched birds in the acacia woodland, and ate our picnic in the cool of The Wildlife Foundation centre on the site of the former School for Field Studies.

Naretunoi Conservancy is a group of households who may be farming or herding livestock, but commit to allow mammals to migrate in and out of the National Park. The Wildlife Foundation looks forward to establishing joint studies with museum scientists or Nature Kenya members. In particular, they would like to record the traditional Maasai names of birds. If you are interested, please contact **Jacob Tukai** <miliatukai@gmail.com>



(LEFT) A female Black Cuckooshrike, which is not a cuckoo, not a shrike – and not black! (RIGHT) A Common Drongo on nest. PHOTOS BY RUPI MANGAT

JANUARY WATERBIRD COUNTS CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

Nature Kenya, the Ornithology Section of the National Museums of Kenya and Kenya Wildlife Service invite volunteers to participate in the African Waterfowl Census at the Rift Valley Lakes in January. Volunteers will camp, with meals provided. Priority will be given to those with experience or providing 4x4 vehicles. Please fill the volunteer form, available from the Ornithology Section or Nature Kenya Membership Office.

- NOTICE TO MEMBERS -



Comet and meteors

■ BY FLEUR NG'WENO

Comet 46P/Wirtanen will pass by the Earth and the sun in mid-December 2018. It may be possible to see it with the unaided eye from a dark location. Comets are balls of ice and dust that travel round the sun in long elliptical orbits. Because they are far, they seem to move slowly across the sky. A comet may just look like a fuzzy, hazy spot among the stars.

According to Space.com, "On Dec. 16, Comet 46P/Wirtanen will be only 7.3 million miles (11.7 million km) away. It will be against the constellation of Taurus the bull, near the Pleiades and Hyades star clusters."

According to In-the-sky.org, "On Dec 16, Comet 46P/Wirtanen is forecast to reach its brightest, at around magnitude 4.7. From Nairobi, it will be visible in the evening sky as the dusk sky fades, 37° above your north-eastern horizon. It will then reach its highest point in the sky at 22:37, 67° above your northern horizon. It will continue to be observable until around 03:15, when it sinks to 19° above your north-western horizon."

"Note that the future positions of comets are typically known with a high degree of confidence, but their brightness are often much more unpredictable, since it is impossible to predict with certainty how they will respond as they move closer to the Sun." Remember that the comet will be bright and near the Pleiades and Hyades star clusters for a few days before and a few days after Dec 16.

Meteors

In early December, the Earth travels through an area of dust and rocks in space. Some of these particles may fall into the earth's atmosphere and burn up. We call them meteors or "shooting stars" (although they are not stars). Look for the Geminids meteor shower on a dark, clear night after midnight from Dec 7 to 17, especially early on the 14th. The Quadrantids meteor shower will be on January 1 to 5, best after midnight.

Moon, Dec 2018

Dec 7 – new moon. Dec 15 – first quarter. Dec 22 – full moon. Dec 29 – last quarter.

Planets, Dec '18 – Jan '19

Beautiful bright Mars is high in the sky, but fading and moving west each night as its orbit takes it away from Earth. Saturn is low in the west, disappearing below the horizon in mid-December. The moon is near Saturn on Dec 9, and near Mars on Dec 14-15 and

January 12-13.

The morning sky is where the planet action is. Brilliant Venus rises steadily in the eastern sky before dawn. Mercury, tiny but bright, rises below it in December, and by mid-month Jupiter too appears above the sunrise. On December 15 Mercury is at its highest, then sinks down again, passing Jupiter on the 21st.

Early in January, Venus reaches its highest point in the eastern sky, then slowly sinks lower, while Jupiter continues to rise. The moon is near Venus on January 1st, near Jupiter on the 3rd, near Mercury on the 4th – and then close to Venus and Jupiter on the 31st. Venus and Jupiter pass each other on January 22 – worth getting up early to see!

Dec-Jan stars

The distinctive constellation of Orion, the Hunter or Warrior, rises due east on December evenings, climbing higher each night. Look for three bright stars in a row, with four bright stars like a box around them.

North (left) of Orion, the stars of the Hyades cluster form a shape like the letter V. The reddish star Aldebaran, the fiery eye of the constellation Taurus the bull, is at the open end of the "V". The moon is near Aldebaran on Dec 21 and Jan 17.

Further north, several bright stars are grouped close together – the Pleiades or Seven Sisters of Greek myths. With binoculars, you can see more stars and a glowing blue haze. In mid-December, Comet 46P/Wirtanen will be a blurred spot of light near the Pleiades and Hyades star clusters.

As the year ends, Sirius, the brightest star we can see at night, rises southeast of Orion. Canopus, the second brightest star, appears further to the south.

The star Fomalhaut is in the southwest below Mars, and below it the bright star Achernar is still prominent in the south.

Moon, Jan '19

Jan 6 – new moon. Jan 14 – first ¼. Jan 21 – full moon, a little closer and brighter than usual. Jan 27 – last ¼.

Sun

On the solstice, December 21, the sun is at its furthest point south. Here on the equator we may not notice this, but you will notice that the sun rises and sets later each day. Sunrise and sunset are half an hour later at the end of January than they were in November. ☀

IN THE FIELD

DECEMBER 2018 AT A GLIMPSE

Dec 1 st	FoCP Nature Walk
Dec 5 th	Morning Bird Walk
Dec 8 th	Members Trip - Eburu Forest
Dec 12 th	Morning Bird Walk
Dec 15 th	FoCP Nature Walk
Dec 16 th	Sunday Bird Watch
Dec 19 th	Morning Bird Walk
Dec 26 th	Morning Bird Walk

JANUARY 2019 AT A GLIMPSE

Jan 2 nd	Morning Bird Walk
Jan 5 th	FoCP Nature Walk
Jan 9 th	Morning Bird Walk
Jan 16 th	Morning Bird Walk
Jan 19 th	FoCP Nature Walk
Jan 20 th	Sunday Bird Watch
Jan 23 rd	Morning Bird Walk
Jan 30 th	Morning Bird Walk

Bird ringing every Tuesday morning (check with Ornithology section, National Museums).

Birders Please Note! The Wednesday Morning Birdwalks meet at 8:30 am at the Nairobi National Museum. Transport is on a self-help basis. The group meets in the courtyard of the Nairobi National Museum, past the entrance to the galleries. We normally return at about 12:30 pm.

The Sunday Birdwatch on the THIRD Sunday of each month now also meets at 8:30 am, at the same location. It is a day trip; please bring water and lunch.

Mombasa Birdwalks On the 3rd Saturday of each month. For meeting time and place, please contact Taibali Hamzali <thamzali@gmail.com> / 0733-980540; or Doris Schaule <dorischaule@gmail.com> / 0722-277752. Or check Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/FFJmombasa/>

Contact the office for information on other birdwalks in Kakamega, Kisumu, and other sites

Ngong Forest walks - 1st and 3rd Saturday at 9.00 am. Contact Simon 0729-840715

FUNDAMENTALS OF ORNITHOLOGY

A Certificate Course for Bird Guides and Birders



Kindly register for the FoO 2019 Course that will take place at

Elsamere Field Study Centre, Naivasha from
28th March - 5th April 2019

Participation fee is KSh 56, 000 for Kenyan citizens and US \$680 for residents and foreign participants.

Upto 5 scholarships (50% of fees) available for Kenyans from least atlassed areas, in support of Kenya Bird Map

For more information send an email to:
foo@naturekenya.org



NatureKenya
Wishes you
Happy
Holidays



Download free QR Readers from the web and scan this QR (Quick Response) code with your smart phone for pictures and more stories.

Yes! Start my NatureKenya membership

Surname _____
First Name _____
Ms/Mr/Title _____
Address _____
Tel. _____
Mobile _____
Email _____

MEMBERSHIP TYPES		
Ksh Per Year		
Full		2,000
Sponsor		6,000
Family		2,800
Student		1,200
Schools, Clubs		1,500
Corporates		20,000 -30,000



JOIN/RENEW MEMBERSHIP

- Select 'Lipa na Mpesa'
- Select 'Pay Bill'
- Enter business number 100300
- Enter account number (put your lapsed membership number or write new member)
- Enter the amount, enter your PIN
- Confirm details & press OK

For details on associated groups such as Youth Committee, Succulenta, and Friends of Nairobi Arboretum, City Park or Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, contact office@naturekenya.org